

Weird Tales

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317 Baldwin Building

Indianapolis, Ind.

*It Is Not to Be Wondered at that
This Man Became a Maniac*

The HOUSE, the LIGHT and the MAN

By GORDON PHILIP ENGLAND

Author of "Adventures of an Astral" and "The Master of Hell"

THE house sits back some distance from the highway. All else around is pleasing to the view, but this dark, grim building is a blot on the landscape. Encircled by a tall, ragged hedge, which conceals the lower part of the building from the eyes of passers-by, it seems almost like a portion of another world, and has little in common with neighboring dwellings.

People going by glance up at the gloomy edifice with feelings akin to terror, then hurry on. After turning a curve in the road beyond, they breathe a sigh of relief, feeling as a prisoner freed from captivity might feel.

That is during daytime. At night, few pedestrians are daring enough to pass that dwelling.

Even motorists, when realizing they have reached its vicinity, nervously increase their speed and, sweeping by in a swirl of dust, leave the gloomy pile far behind.

Yet few can pass without first turning their eyes toward a narrow window near the top of the building. For from that window gleams the light, and they know that in the room behind the casement is the man who fears the dark. They know the light is always there during hours of darkness, and will doubtless always be there while the man lives.

Once (it happened some weeks after the man had come) the light went out. And even yet, though that was fifteen years ago, dwellers in near-by houses shudder when they remember the sounds that were heard on that occasion. The unearthly shrieks, the piercing cries of utter anguish, the screams of direst terror—all these ring in their ears as they recall that evening. And nightly, before retiring, they pray that the light may not go out.

Their prayer has been mercifully answered. For when the first shadows of twilight begin to fall, the light also appears, to burn with steady, undiminished power until darkness is past.

It has never gone out again, and probably never will until the man dies. Then, and not until then, it will be extinguished.

GIBSON JENKINS pressed the elevator bell impatiently. He glanced down the shaft expectantly.

But the elevator did not appear. He waited several minutes. Still it did not come.

Jenkins was much annoyed. He had now been waiting nearly ten minutes. Ten minutes seems a long time to a man who is in a hurry.

It was the first time Gibson Jenkins had ever been in this department store. He had gone to see the man-

ager that afternoon to transact an item of business. While they had been discussing terms, the telephone had rung, and after taking the message the manager had gone out, telling Jenkins he would be back within five minutes. Five minutes had lengthened into a half hour, but the manager had not returned.

Had Jenkins but known it, there had been excellent reason for his non-appearance. While attempting to cross the street ahead of traffic, he had been knocked down by a motor car, and was now in an ambulance en route to a repair shop.

Jenkins, of course, was unaware of this. However, he had decided not to wait longer, and was now standing peering down the elevator shaft, muttering anathemas against managers and elevator boys alike.

After ringing several more times, he suddenly remembered that the closing whistle had blown several minutes before, and realized the elevator boy had left the building.

He also remembered having seen a flight of stairs at the other end of the corridor. So he went back to look for them.

It was growing dark inside the building. Jenkins noticed this, and glanced at his watch nervously.

It was exactly fifteen minutes past 6.

Jenkins disliked darkness and had no desire to remain in the store longer. Hurrying to the stairway, he commenced the descent hastily.

Haste is not always expedient. Jenkins was too hasty. Consequently, his foot slipped. He lost his balance and plunged downward. His head struck the bottom step rather forcibly, and, the step being composed of cement, he immediately lost interest in his surroundings.

GIBSON JENKINS opened his eyes wonderingly.

He was much dazed, and some minutes elapsed before he could recall what had occurred.

It had been twilight when he had fallen, but it was now very dark. He could not remember ever having been in so dark a place before.

Slowly he sat up and looked around. But it was too dark to see anything. The only thing he could discover was that he was at the bottom of the flight.

Drawing his luminous-faced watch from his pocket, he tried to ascertain the time of night. It was exactly fifteen minutes past 6.

This perplexed him. It had been fifteen minutes past 6 when he had fallen, hadn't it? How then, could it be the same time now?

He puzzled over the matter for quite a while without arriving at a satisfactory conclusion. Then, a thought leaked through into his slowly clearing brain, and holding the watch to his ear, he listened. Yes, it had stopped.

Jenkins pressed tremulous hands against his throbbing temple.

"How long have I been lying here?" he wondered aloud.

As if to answer his question, a big clock somewhere in the building began to chime the hour. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven!

Jenkins struggled to his feet. Eleven o'clock! He had been unconscious nearly five hours!

He began to grope his way up the stairs. He was very weak, but a plan had formulated within his mind: he would go back to the manager's office and telephone for help.

But on reaching the top of the steps, he stood bewildered. He had forgotten in which direction the office lay.

After a moment, though, he struck blindly through the intense darkness

toward where he thought the room ought to be.

Having walked several feet, he bumped against a wall. Turning, he walked in the opposite direction, hands before him, seeking for the office door.

But it was his head that struck it finally, not his hands—struck with such force that the door swung open; and stumbling through the aperture, Jenkins fell upon hands and knees on the floor within.

Rising painfully, he groped for the telephone. But though he knocked against other objects in the room, the telephone itself eluded him.

Jenkins was now becoming frightened. He was naturally a timid man, and the events of the night had not increased his courage.

He tried again to locate the telephone, but still without success.

Then he searched his pockets for a match. And to his surprise; for he was not in the habit of carrying them, he found a solitary lucifer. He lit it, and looked eagerly about him. And then the match fell from his palsied fingers to the floor, flickered, and went out.

Gibson Jenkins had seen enough—in fact he had seen too much. He was not in the office after all: he was in a room full of coffins!

With a horrified exclamation, Jenkins dashed for the door. And for the second time that night haste proved his undoing. For he ran directly against it, and it slammed shut.

Frantically Jenkins searched for the door knob. Finally finding it, he tried to pull the door open. To his horror it resisted his effort. He pulled harder, exerted every iota of his strength; but the door remained fast. It was equipped with a spring lock.

IN A corner of the coffin room crouched Gibson Jenkins. He was shivering from head to foot, like a man with the ague. Cold sweat broke

out on his forehead and trickled slowly down his cheeks.

It was no longer utterly dark in that room: the moon had come up and her pale rays, streaming through a window, partly illuminated the coffin chamber. Jenkins could make out indistinctly the dim shapes of the coffins around him, which were piled one upon another to a height of several feet.

Jenkins was not looking at these, however, so much as at a large coffin in the middle of the floor at the opposite side of the room. Upon this one his attention was riveted. He felt that in this coffin lay danger.

He seemed to sense another presence in the room. He could not see it, yet he was nevertheless positive it was there. And he was also sure it was the big coffin which contained that dangerous presence. So he squatted huddled in a shaking, shuddering heap, with frightened eyes fixed upon the casket.

He remembered many things while crouching there—remembered how he had once laughed at a friend who had related a supernatural experience, and how that friend had warned him, telling him spirits often punish those who dare disbelieve in them. He remembered, too, the other ghost stories he had been told and had read, and at the remembrance he shuddered more than before.

And he watched the coffin with a feeling that the thing contained therein was watching him also, and was noting his every motion. At the thought, he shrank farther into his corner, seeking to escape its gaze. Yet still it seemed following him.

Now, to his horror, Jenkins began to feel a desire to go over to the coffin. He thrust back the desire, but still it gripped him. His body and will were struggling for mastery, and body triumphed. He began moving toward the coffin. He tried to hold back his body, but still it advanced. Nearer

and nearer he glided to that dreadful presence.

Again the big clock struck. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve. It was midnight!

The sound appeared to paralyze Gibson Jenkins. He no longer moved in the direction of the coffin. Instead, he squatted stockstill in the middle of the chamber.

Then, to his consternation, the lid of the coffin began to rise.

Higher and higher it rose, until at last the wretched man beheld a form leaving the casket.

And then shriek after shriek re-echoed through the old building.

IN THE morning, attracted by strange sounds emanating from the coffin room, some employees opened the door. There, squatted upon the floor, rocking backward and forward, mouthing and gibbering inarticulately, was a white-haired, old-looking man whom none of them recognized. Later, however, they discovered the name Gibson Jenkins on calling cards in his pockets. A few days afterward, the manager, after leaving the hospital, positively identified him.

When the employees found him, he was facing a big coffin lying in the center of the room. The lid of the coffin had been raised, and the casket was empty.

A window at one end of the room was unlocked and open. It was only a ten-foot drop to the roof of an adjoining building.

On the preceding afternoon a thief had scooped several rings and watches from a tray in the jewelry department

on the next floor. The floorwalker had given chase, but had lost him in the crowd. The detective at the entrance, however, had claimed the man had not passed him.

A thorough search of the building had revealed nothing, though, so it had been thought the detective had been mistaken.

Now the management believed the thief had not left the building, after all, but had concealed himself in the coffin, intending to come out later and obtain other booty. He had remained in the casket several hours, wishing to assure himself that the coast was clear before continuing operations.

Then Gibson Jenkins had entered the room, and by locking the door spoiled the robber's plans. But by making sundry weird noises the burglar had worked upon Jenkins' superstitious nature until he had reduced him to a state of helpless fright. Then, leaving the casket, the thief had made good his escape.

That was the theory of the management of the department store.

His physician endeavored to make clear that theory to Gibson Jenkins. But Gibson Jenkins was totally unable to understand it. Indeed, as Gibson Jenkins, he no longer existed. He had now become simply a man who feared the dark.

A HUNDRED yards back from the road stands the house. It is a strange-looking house, a house which people shun. From a window of that house shines the light; in the room whence the light shines is a man, a man afraid of the dark. The window is barred with rusty iron bars. And the house is—a madhouse!

